Issue Six April 2016

# aargh!

Aotearoa Anarchist Review

# Colonisation

## The Treaty
## Prisons
## The Land Wars
## Decolonising movements
## Land rights in Scotland
## The Opium Wars

EDITORIAL

# World domination in sixteen pages

OK, THIS issue really is full of words – there's an awful lot of them and it's pretty dense reading at times. We usually make things a bit easier with pictures and other bits and pieces, but colonisation is a subject that hasn't been covered well by radical writers, especially recently, and we need to devote more space to it.

Arguably, colonisation has shaped the world we live in today more than anything else. The ruling class of just a few countries began a process of taking control of land, defining culture and language, and dictating history in their own countries, before spreading this policy to their near neighbours, as Ken V describes in an article on the English colonisation of Scotland, then to the rest of the world.

Even those countries that remained nominally independent were forced under the thumb of the small group of European, and a couple of other, dominant countries, as Sam Buchanan notes in a review of Julia Lovell's *The Opium Wars*. In this country, colonisation faced stiff resistance, some of which is covered in Peppertree's review of a book on the Land Wars. Emmy looks at the way the prison system was instituted to serve, and is used to continue, colonial oppression.

While the political left has decried colonisation, its actual responses have mostly been weak and tokenistic, as Teanau Tuiono and Sam Buchanan comment on. And as Graham Cameron points out, the New Zealand government has been unwilling to help pick up the pieces when the mess caused by the imposition of European-styled nation states on areas such as the Middle East throws up new problems.

Obviously, we've barely scratched the surface of this subject – there's much more to be said and even more to be done. We hope this issue will spark debate, and that anarchists will give this subject the attention it deserves. And if you want to write further on this, or other subjects from an anarchist point of view, please get in touch. We need people to help distribute this 'zine too, if anyone is keen.

Cheers

*The Freedom Shop Collective.*


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Contact us by e-mail at freedomshopaotearoa@gmail.com or, if you are conversant with the technology, write to us by 'post' at
P.O. Box 9263,
Wellington 6141,
Aotearoa/New Zealand

And check our blog for news and events at freedomshopaotearoa.blogspot.co.nz

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*(continued from opposite page)*

Often what we say is in direct conflict with perceptions of the mainstream and this runs right against the need to get succinct soundbites and associated actions.

But what if the mainstream is just some grubby white guy sitting on the couch drinking beer and watching rugby? Every 10 minutes or so he belches something about foreigners taking jobs or how on-point Mike Hosking is?

This is the danger of living in societies which put the interests of even a majority over interests that would benefit everybody – those that don't fit into the majority will always miss out. Labour parties are classic examples of organisations that will ride into power on a wave of leftist popularity only to shaft minorities when they think it will appeal to the wider populace. (Think 2004 Seabed and Foreshore Act and the 2007 Anti-Terrorist raids)

If we are to get our shit together, then movements need to decolonise practice and find better ways to work with Indigenous Peoples' movements on a basis of integrity and respect @@@

# Decolonising Movements
## – reflections on the global climate march

**By Teanau Tuiono**

*He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me – Frantz Fanon*

IN THE aftermath of the Paris Terrorist attacks martial law is declared. The ensuing crackdown on climate protesters sends panic through the Climate Coalition's plans for a series of mass climate mobilisations around the COP21 UN climate summit. Two people and a sign is illegal. Although one of the bombs went off at Stade de France – sports games can still go ahead. They are targeting protesters under the guise of defending against terrorism. I've been here before.

Big moneyed NGOs like Avaaz and Greenpeace bow immediately to authority. Presumably an attempt to defy the authorities would impact on their positive messaging and appeal to the mainstream.

We decide that some of our indigenous bloc that were going to lead the Paris march would split: some would go to the nearest city, London and lead the march as a part of the 'Wretched of the Earth Bloc'. The liberal obsession of appealing to the mainstream to the detriment of the marginalised comes to a head in London.

Statement from the Wretched of the Earth Bloc – London:

> "Our place at the front of the march was not bestowed upon us. It was fought for, behind the scenes, for months, and after much pushback, it was agreed that we would lead the march. However, the agreement it seems was contingent upon us merely acting out our ethnicities – through attire, song and dance, perhaps – to provide a good photo-op, so that you might tick your narrow diversity box...
>
> On Sunday, our bloc arrived at the march only to find that you had organised a most colourful form of sabotage. Our place had been given to a group of people dressed in animal headgear. After having invited the Pacific Island and Sami people to lead the bloc, you then took away the main banner of the march and asked them to hold signs instead. The banners made by indigenous communities were covered up. Signs that proclaimed indigenous and global south communities as the 'Wretched of the Earth' and charged 'British Imperialism causes climate injustice' were to be removed in favor of those that projected a more 'positive message'."

To repeat: the place of indigenous, black and brown people was stolen and given away to people dressed as animals. Let's say it again: so long as indigenous, black, and brown people were unwilling to merely add decorative value they were replaceable by animals.

I get an email from an aboriginal bro in Sydney – similar issues had arisen there as well.

Statement from the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy and SOSBlakAustralia:

> "After further consultation the People's Climate March Sydney continued to ignore advice and proved how unrepresented and tokenistically used Aboriginal peoples are within the climate movement. The People's Climate March Sydney continued to make it difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices to be heard by not allowing us speaking time and limiting Elder Aunty Jenny Munro to minutes worth of speaking time at the rally, as well as putting a 100-piece samba band behind our block, which would drown our voices for the entirety of the march. We also had to argue again to lead the march as PCM attempted to renege and put other groups in front."

The group Nuclear For Climate Change has been allowed to take part in the People's Climate March in Sydney. This is a complete contradiction to the climate change movement. Also, during the consultation with Aboriginal community members and Elders it was expressed on more than one occasion in more than one meeting that the Aboriginal community does not support ANY nuclear movement and would not be involved or aligned with such groups. There are currently plans to dump nuclear waste and mine uranium from traditional lands which also is connected to forced community closures. We do however strongly support the Anti Nuclear Movement!

I get why some activists prefer to advocate on environmental issues unlike us trees, animals and ecosystems don't talk back. We talk back, and sometimes it is loud and sometimes it is uncomfortable.

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# New Zealand's 2015: the year we hid from a world in need

**By Graham Cameron**

THE LONG fragrant grass is yellowing out the open door, life burning off exposed to our southern sun. A quiet breeze dances with stubbornly green trees and a few sheep regard me thoughtfully as they chew cud. The strangely dramatic music of children's programming competes with the stereo for attention and children struggle with each other for the last few pieces of lego to build their impossible dreams. Pools are forming around defrosting meat packs on the bench and I'm wondering if this is a socially acceptable time for a beer. Summer holidays for the rich in Aotearoa New Zealand, a world away from the events that fill my newsfeed.

We New Zealanders have shown a blithe disregard for each and every one of these events that have shaped the world's discourse in 2015: child poverty; Syrian refugees; our clean green image; mining and drilling; domestic violence; rape culture; race relations; privacy and metadata; and carbon emissions. Our disregard has been encouraged by our political leaders and meekly parroted by the majority of the media, but it is indeed our choice as individuals and communities to put events that affect others at a distance from ourselves. Our disregard is supported by two myths: poverty is a failure of moral character (the bludger); and with us sticking our nose into the intractable and complex conflicts in the Middle East, the second is that some people are not people like us but sub-human (the Japanese in WW2, and Arabs of any nation today).

Some may protest that most New Zealanders care for these issues, are concerned for their resolution and a part of the dialogue to change our world. They'll point to marches, social media activism, opinion pieces and blogs, grand speeches given in parliament. Don't be fooled; this is our echo chamber that in no way reflects what most of our citizens believe. The continued popularity of our prime minister and the National Party are a safer measure; we New Zealanders are a country with blithe disregard for others.

Walter Brueggemann, the foremost Old Testament theologian alive today, asserts that a key function of any empire is to convince its citizens that there is no future, no evolution, no development. The empire needs its citizens to believe that it and they will exist forever in the status quo. The empire endures where all else may fail. Neo-liberal capitalism and the rise of corporate empires stick to the same playbook, convincing us New Zealanders that our existence and

*Page three*

life requires unending growth and that all potential threats and risks can be managed to ensure that will happen. Obviously the climate conference in Paris is the latest event of corporate solidarity in defence of the empire: governments assured each other they would do nothing to affect their economic growth and admired the technological solutions that corporations told them will resolve climate change but require no retooling of countries and economies. The Paris climate conference was another opiate to the masses.

Brueggemann goes on to point out the problem with the narrative of empires: "All previous empires have fallen. All empires will fall. Our empire is falling."

A leap of faith? The cracks are apparent: the international economy is back in a similar situation to 2008 but with significantly larger debts; the gates to our countries, the gates of our freedom and progress are closed to the desperate and hopeless; fascist rhetoric has come in from the Nuremburg trials to once again be a "legitimate" political discourse; the brakes are off on military spending but firmly on for social spending. The cracks in our empire are readily apparent if you care to look.

We New Zealanders are not uncaring and shallow. We New Zealanders are just scared. We've been told that beyond the blue skies, white capped mountains, swaying fields of maize, golden beaches and crashing waves, over the horizon, thar' be monsters. Monsters on our planes returning from our favourite poverty-stricken holiday locations, monsters heavy laden on rickety boats, monsters madly cruising deserts in Toyota Hiluxes, monsters coming to take what is ours. Our birthright, ours by right of conquest and forgetfulness. Gone are the New Zealanders of courage who welcomed hundreds after WW2, who spoke strongly for the formation of the UN, who fought at the ports for the rights of workers, who turned American warships away. We New Zealanders are just scared, and so 2015 was the year in which we tried to hide away.

We can look back on a year in which we New Zealanders firmly entrenched a reputation as failed international citizens, more concerned with locking doors, erecting fences, and installing alarms than feeding the starving, relief to the thirsty, clothing the naked, bringing succour to the prisoner. So at the close of 2015, here's to us; we can count ourselves as amongst the villains on the international stage, cowards who hid when the world needed us the most @@@

First published on Graham's *First we take Manhattan* blog.

# The Nice Colonists
## Principles, partnership and pretence in leftist la-la land

By Sam Buchanan

THIS IS a critique of the Pākeha left's view of the Treaty of Waitangi. Mostly I'm describing the views on the Treaty and colonisation held by left social democrats, but this is much the same as the analysis put forward by self-described radicals.

Over the years, activists working for the ratification of the Treaty have succeeded in pushing the Treaty on to the political agenda – adding it to numerous constitutions, terms of reference, manifestos, mission statements and other documents. The result has been that the interpretation of the Treaty has been diluted to be unthreatening, meaningless and to present no challenge to the status quo. Many Treaty advocates have little critique of power, and interpret the Treaty and colonisation in purely racial terms. In the name of removing the fear some parts of the population feel for the process of decolonisation, the possibilities for positive impacts – for everyone in Aotearoa/New Zealand – have also been removed.

In recent years, the radical left hasn't done much to develop a view of its own. A few Marxists think we are all workers and colonisation can be ignored. Many Pākeha anarchists and others have yet to seriously thrash out where they stand in relation to colonisation in Aotearoa. Anarchists need to be visible in debates over Māori aspirations, particularly in a time when pro-colonial people are getting more space in public discussions. This article won't answer all the questions, but hopefully will at least put the cat amongst the kereru and cause some discussion.

This is a Pākeha viewpoint, coming from a first-generation colonist. At times I've felt it necessary to comment on what Māori have done, but I'm no expert about such matters – take all such statements with a grain of salt. When I say 'we', I mean Pākeha New Zealanders.

### An inconvenient Treaty

In James Thurber's fairy tale, The White Deer, King Clode announces a simple edict, but the Royal Recorder tells him the wording is "far too clear".

*"It should be writ in such a way that if you ever changed your mind, the point could be disowned, denied and disavowed."*

The Treaty of Waitangi is similar, it's far too clear. Some hapu didn't sign it, so they never gave up any rights to the colonial government. Some did, and for them, the Treaty guarantees their sovereignty – at very least over their lands and settlements that they haven't chosen to sell – the right to retain their possessions, the same rights as the people of England and gives the Crown governorship and a monopoly on the purchase of Maori land.

This makes things a bit tricky. Should the Treaty be put into effect; it would disestablish the rule of the Pākeha establishment over Māori. Not putting into effect a legal agreement, however, would disestablish the rule of law, which the Pākeha establishment is very proud of and considers itself to have created, so the only solution is to follow King Clode's advisor's advice and create myths and confusion to make the problem more difficult than it is, for fear that it will otherwise be solved.

These myths say "We want to honour the Treaty, but let's confuse matters so we can pick the few bits of it we are happy to honour, decide for ourselves what honouring them means, and further decide which bits (most of them) we are going to ignore as they are too costly or challenging for us." One of these myths is about 'partnership' and the ways in which Pākeha can respect 'their' side of the Treaty deal.

The social democratic model presents a mystified version of the Treaty which it sees as complex and open to interpretation. It pays lip service to the term 'tino rangatiratanga' and calls on Pākeha, rather than the Crown, to demonstrate 'partnership' by occasionally consulting with Māori and enriching both themselves, by learning some Te Reo or tikanga, and their institutions, by adopting some Māori ceremonial practices.

Pākeha Treaty politics are a way of making 'our' colonisation less bad than other colonisation, justifying

and perpetuating it. The standard excuse of colonists the world over is "we're different, we're a much nicer kind of colonists." This usually means "we were unable to wipe these people out, so we chose to portray ourselves as humanitarians for not doing something we couldn't have done anyway."

It was Māori political astuteness, a degree of economic leverage, military power and Pākeha recognition of the value of Māori labour, rather than high-minded honkies, that made genocide or complete dispossession probably impossible and certainly a hard task. Māori willingness to adapt to some colonial ways, the failure and rejection of armed struggle, and the choice to attempt peaceful methods of resistance made continued military violence, always a costly solution, largely unnecessary for the Pākeha state (except when the government got worried that Māori peaceful resistance just might work, such as at Parihaka and in the so-called 'Dog Tax War', when the military was again unleashed or alerted).

As time wore on, Māori turned to legal challenges, protest and attempts to set up independent power structures. Nothing much worked and while Māori struggles never went away, they ebbed and flowed under the competing influences of anger, patience, disappointment, a sense of injustice and the need to simply survive.

Dispossessed of their land and resources, they became a useful reserve labour force, a further resource to be mined, just like their fish and forests. We're so enlightened we let them work for our benefit.

Many Māori didn't sign the Treaty, but that's not the point. If the Treaty didn't exist, the injustices of colonisation would still need to be addressed. Whether particular hapu signed the Treaty or not doesn't alter the history and the need to fix the mess everyone is living in.

### Pretending it's not there

The myth of partnership became necessary as the attempt to completely dismiss the Treaty failed. The policy of ignoring The Treaty was marked by the invasion of Waikato in 1863 and by Chief Justice Prendergast's 1877 declaration, in the case of Wi Parata vs. The Bishop of Wellington, that the Treaty was "a simple nullity". But Māori refused to forget about the Treaty, embrace capitalism and learn to love the colonial government.

Māori continually worked to remedy the injustices of colonisation. After the wars, they turned to non-violent protest, petitions to the British monarch and to the New Zealand parliaments, they organised their own parliaments, their own monarch in the Waikato and agitated for redress through courts, parliamentary representation and every other possible channel.

By the mid-1970s, growing Māori protest was scaring the bejeezus out of the Labour government. An insider told me that at the time, Labour party top dogs were privately saying that the country was heading for a civil war. Māori were becoming increasingly radicalised and, in rural areas, had access to large numbers of firearms. Pretending the Treaty and colonial injustices didn't exist wasn't working anymore, and the government looked for a way to divert protest, and split radicals from reformists. It came up with the Waitangi Tribunal, a permanent commission of inquiry to investigate breaches of The Treaty and make recommendations to the government for reparations.

From a legal perspective this was a bit weird as you'd expect breaches of a legal agreement to be sorted out by the courts. Traditionally, setting up a 'commission of inquiry' is what governments do when they want to fudge things, or put off a problem in the hope that it will go away. I guess a 'permanent' commission of inquiry is something you set up when you are pretty sure a problem won't go away and you need to make the fudging perpetual.

### Pretending it's something else

The 'partnership' myth largely comes from the social democratic left and, as far as I can tell, was something dreamed up in the late-1980s, drawing on the decision of the Court of Appeal in the New Zealand Māori Council vs. the Attorney General case in 1987.

This case was taken to prevent government assets being transferred to private ownership as part of the Labour government's privatisation process and thus removing them from possible Treaty claims. The Court of Appeal, rather than ascertain the legal meaning of the Treaty, took the peculiar step of deriving a set of 'principles' from the Treaty, in effect, rewriting it. These included, amongst others, 'partnership' 'the right of the state to govern' and 'the duty of the state to protect' Māori. The Labour government then drew up a similar set of 'Treaty principles' to refer to in legislation.

The weaker variant of the 'Treaty principles' myth is the basis of the current policy of the New Zealand state, while it's stronger version is dubbed 'radical' by the left social democrats and others who uphold it. This self-serving myth is characterised by its veneration of the Treaty as a 'founding document' for New Zealand, which supposedly gives legitimacy to the New Zealand government and Pākeha the right to live here.

It sets aside the issue of many hapu not having signed the Treaty and ignores what it actually says. You can argue about the meaning of 'governership/kawana-tanga' but having clearly stated that chiefs have 'tino rangatiratanga' the Treaty obviously severely limits the colonial state's power and maintains that of Māori chiefs. Social democrats also treat the Treaty as an agreement between Pākeha and Māori rather than

between the Crown and Māori, making individual Pākeha responsible for carrying out its terms.

The historical circumstances that led to the signing of the Treaty are also ignored – New Zealand's declaration of independence in 1835 and clear records which demonstrate that Māori of the time did not regard the Treaty as a giving up of sovereignty. There's also the common sense argument that while some hapu were aware of British power and felt intimidated by it, others were under no pressure, and had no reason whatsoever, to give up control of their land. It would be incomprehensible to imagine such hapu signing a Treaty which gave the current government control of their lands and lives. In reality some refused to sign, others signed in the confident belief that they were not giving up sovereignty.

Some argue that the current New Zealand state is legitimate because it is accepted by the overwhelming majority of its citizens, but you could use the same argument to justify the existence of criminal gangs in some places. Given the same state organised the immigration of most of its supporters, and that it's pretty easy to gain a grudging acceptance by simply refusing to go away, it's a weak and unsatisfying argument.

Most groups accept that the Treaty is 'problematic'. The problem is that the more you look at it, the more problematic it gets.

There is nothing in the Treaty that gives specific rights to Pākeha to be here. The recently coined phrase 'Tangata Tiriti' to describe immigrants and their descendants would make sense if the Treaty had been put into practice, but it wasn't. Māori had no power or influence over who was allowed to settle here. Immigrants arrived despite the Treaty, not under a mandate from it. Does anybody seriously believe Māori were fool enough to sign up for a process which would make them a minority in their own land?

Interestingly, while the Treaty is referred to as a 'founding document' in statements for popular consumption, Pākeha constitutional law doesn't recognise the Treaty as a basis for the existence of the present state, but simply declares the government's legitimacy as being based on the principle of de facto power, in other words, it is a fact that it is exercising power, therefore it is legitimate.

This raises an interesting question – when did the New Zealand state become legitimate by virtue of its ability to exercise power? It wasn't able to exercise power over the country in 1840 – lacking all means to do so. In 1845 its attempt to use military means to enforce its power failed. As late as 1916 the state had to resort to a military expedition to enforce its power in the Urewera, but the colonial state effectively stamped its authority on the country after the wars of the 1860s removed any direct threat to its control. The state's de facto power was finally gained by the conquest of Taranaki and the Waikato.

Social democrats don't like the idea of the state's legitimacy resting on its ability to wage wars of conquest. In common English 'de facto power' means 'we're in charge because we're bigger than you.' Social democrats desperately look for another way to legitimise existing state power, no matter how weak or silly their justification is.

For the social democratic left, the Treaty is an excuse for not addressing their position in a colonised country. For both social democrats and conservatives, support for Māori self-determination, or power in any form, is predicated on Māori accepting a framework that suits the former parties. Conservatives will accept Māori power that mirrors their own – a small business elite or 'brown table' that uses business or political means to pursue wealth. Similarly, social democrats will accept Māori pursuit of wealth via business and political power within a parliamentary framework. For social democrats 'partnership' is only possible once Māori have accepted the right of social democrats to define the environment within which the partnership takes place. We can work together so long as you follow my rules. Māori are expected to pander to the expectations of social democrats – to be good 'liberals'.

Neither left social democrats nor conservatives want to challenge the basics of colonisation – the establishment of the New Zealand state on a British model, the imposition of a European culture and language and a massive theft of Māori resources – but sometimes feel a bit guilty and awkward about it. Like Prozac, the 'Treaty principles' myth helps the bad feelings go away. The 'government, conservatives and social democrats are not addressing 'Treaty' issues in order to decolonise New Zealand, but to ensure that the colonial project continues unimpeded, but with the added strength of participation by a relatively affluent minority of Māori. Resistance to colonisation is necessary but needs to be rooted in something other than the Treaty, in justice, not law.

### What Pākeha can do

*"When I hear of an 'equity' in a case like this, I am reminded of a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat which isn't there"* – Lord Bowen.

We do not need a 'Treaty process' but a decolonisation process. 'Treaty' is a word liberals use to get around their fear of the word 'colonisation'. The Treaty is a legal document – not a manifesto for a decolonised society. We can fulfil the limited legal definition of the Treaty without solving any real problems.

Modern re-interpretations of the Treaty make it all

things to everyone. Social democrats portray it as a progressive manifesto, conservatives as a document concerning property rights.

The conservative view of the Treaty is influential at present as many Māori groups are currently in a phase of wanting to build up economic resources, understanding that any real independence or autonomy requires an economic base, and also having successfully revived and developed arts and language, both in elite circles (galleries, academia, use of Te Reo by government) and participatory ways (kapa haka, popular music, weaving, carving and decoration) to the point that they no longer need to be priorities. It's also the case that the corporatisation of iwi means they are often talking the same language as the conservative right.

There's nothing wrong with Māori using the Treaty as legal leverage to get results from politicians and others with stunted brains who are only able to recognise legal processes and unable to envisage justice. Sometimes you have to work at the level of the lowest common denominator. But Treaty 'settlements', normally constituting an apology and some financial compensation amounting to a tiny fraction of the resources acknowledged as wrongly taken, do not fulfil the terms of the Treaty, nor do they give rise to tino rangatiratanga – they deny it. In some cases, accepting the colonial government's rule is one of the requirements of a 'settlement'.

The policy of transferring resources back to Māori as 'Treaty settlements' presumes that these transfers will be relatively small and take place within a capitalist framework, thus creating a Māori capitalist class who are expected to take on capitalist values, thus becoming 'moderates' and candidates for 'partnership'.

Making progress is not a matter of creating a 'better' interpretation of the Treaty. Basing a relationship on a legal document won't work when the relationship is already problematic. It's time to leave the Treaty behind and build trust and a reputation that we can be proud of. To do this we largely have to stop using 'The Treaty' as shorthand for 'colonisation' and be straight up about what we are trying to do – that is, decolonise New Zealand. It's no use pretending this isn't a huge task, and will be deeply unsettling for many Pākeha. We shouldn't cloak this in obscure terms such as 'Treaty obligations' or try and make Pākeha feel better by pretending our own colonisation wasn't so bad.

A recognition by Pākeha that New Zealand is still a colonial country would be a good start. For many there is still the whole process of becoming Pākeha and shrugging off the attachments to European cultures of a bygone age – a hard thing to do when globalisation threatens the existence of all traditional cultures.

Supporting self determination that includes the right to be different or wrong, rather than only giving support when Māori happen to be doing something that suits your own narrow agenda. This means supporting independent Māori organisations without trying to exert control. This is difficult for social democrats because, deep down, they believe that their supposed enlightened views and advanced education make it right that they be in control of everything and everyone. But it's also difficult for 'radicals' who have their own ideological expectations of Māori.

Radicals, Pākeha or Māori, can offer a useful critique of Māori participation in government or in business, but first one needs to demonstrate a credible commitment to dealing with colonisation. Without that, mouthing off

at Māori businesses, iwi corporates or elites isn't going to carry much weight.

To support tino rangatiratanga, we need to understand that there are class, gender and power issues within Māori society. Not trying to sort it out for Māori, but not seeing any random Māori as a representative of their people or as somebody to blame for the failures created by the elites within Māori society.

What Pākeha actually do in our relationships with Māori are up for debate, and will vary from time to time as needs change, but Māori must have final control over their relationships with Pākeha – otherwise it's just another colonial relationship. Ultimately, Māori need to be able to reject a relationship that they aren't benefiting from. This doesn't mean Māori can dictate Pākeha actions, but where there is a relationship, it must be negotiated, discussed and understood, and be about meeting Māori needs, not Pākeha ones.

Too often the left has regarded itself as special, untainted by colonialism, a natural ally for Māori – this sometimes reaches a ridiculous level, with Pākeha in effect proclaiming 'we're in solidarity with you whether you like it or not' – often the question 'Do you want our solidarity and on what terms?' isn't even asked.

Pākeha need to understand that they must have a clear mandate from Māori to do work to support Māori moves towards self-determination or tino rangatiratanga, and that mandate can be withdrawn, meaning the work ceases. Sometimes you may not be able to offer what Māori want and sometimes Māori are going to turn down your support, but don't respond by going off to sulk.

Without such a mandate Pākeha should stick to working on Pākeha problems and sorting out their own colonial habits – there's plenty to be done here. Pākeha culture is itself under attack from corporates and ideologues that prefer a society of atomised, frustrated consumers, suckers for whatever is on sale. Apart from the obvious depression this causes, people without a sense of identity, a relationship with a wider community of support and a degree of self-respect are likely to spawn many who resent the emergence of confident and successful Māori groups, whatever their form. The resentment of a group that still holds most of the political and economic cards is a dangerous impediment to Māori success. Neither is a shallow, shifting culture based on chasing fashionable consumer goods and entertainment likely to win the respect of Māori. Pākeha need to rediscover or invent, cultural values and practices of their own. Culture makes things more fun.

Personally, I don't see any value in trying to follow the ways of my British ancestors. Their culture was based in an environment and time that is alien to me. I'm a product of those traditions. I was brought up with them – they are what made me – but I'm not a slave to them. This is the typical attitude of first generation colonists like me. Later generations get more interested in exploring the history of their ancient relatives, but nobody can recreate their predecessors culture in a completely different environment, even if they are silly enough to try. One of the joys of being washed up on a South Pacific island is I can embrace things from here, there and everywhere and make up the rest. I'm much more excited by the prospect of developing culturally in this context than trying to reinvent the culture of my forbears.

Doing this work doesn't require a Treaty and none of it is required by the Treaty, so why is there such an emphasis on the Treaty in anti-colonial work?

### Where are we all going?

Who knows? The state can try and suppress Māori aspirations or demand that they integrate, which won't work, or we can try and sort things out on a basis of justice, rather than convenience.

The Waitangi Tribunal process is creating an expectation among many Pākeha that there will be a 'full and final' settlement. The government will apologise, pay out some money and that will be the end of all this 'Māori stuff'. This is dangerous, as the expectations of closure will not be met and the lie that Māori have been compensated repeatedly for the same grievances will gain added adherents.

With a backlash against Māori over the last few years, the future doesn't look so good. Knowledge of the history of colonisation in Aotearoa is still very low (in a 2004 survey, only 34 percent of people knew what year the Treaty was signed, and younger people were less likely to know than older). We are still refuting the same historical myths we were 20 years ago. Neoliberalism has severely damaged the collectivist understanding of the world Pākeha used to hold. Trying to resolve historical injustices within an individualist worldview is problematic as people can only see a set of individual grievances and Pākeha feel Māori are demanding individual privileges they themselves don't have.

This is a way to a society infected with fear, suspicion, hostility and tension. The social democratic left has mostly responded to this backlash by joining it or becoming increasingly timid. Things are really bad out there. So the need for a strongly articulated vision of a positive future has never been greater.

The reward at hand if we can deal with the colonial legacy is the joy of living in a tolerant, exciting country in which Māori and other cultures engage with each other freely and with mutual respect. It's a pretty big reward. I reckon we should have a crack at it **@@@**

# Dripping from Head to Whenua

## Primitive Accumulation, Capital Production and the Prison Industrial Complex in Aotearoa New Zealand

By Emilie Rākete

MICHEL Foucault proposes that 'power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society'. It is this complex strategical situation, and the role which the institution and structure of the prison has played within it, which must be analysed to understand the trend of Māori overrepresentation among incarcerated people.

As of 2012, Māori constitute 51 percent of the men's and 58 percent of the women's prison population, a figure vastly disproportionate to the 15 percent of the overall population we constitute. Māori are 3.8 times more likely to be prosecuted than non-Māori and 3.9 times more likely to be convicted. Māori are overwhelmingly subjected to incarceration – the purpose of which is racist social control, beginning with the process of primitive accumulation in the colonial period and onward into the concentration of Māori into a reserve army of labour. The history of colonialism and conflict between Māori and Pākehā structures of power will be central to this genealogical, whakapapa analysis of the prison in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Taranaki in the years leading up to the destruction of Parihaka presents a series of important developments in the deployment of the prison as a tool of colonialism. Prior to the year 1875, Māori composed only three percent of the prisoners held by the occupational British government. In 1879 Te Whiti, rangatira at Parihaka, implemented a sustained campaign of peaceful resistance to British surveyors on sovereign whenua to which the Crown had no claim. Between 1879 and 1881, citizens of Parihaka moved survey stones, ploughed land 'sold' to settlers by Crown agents and built fences (functional and symbolic) across roads. By 1880, more than 600 citizens of Parihaka, largely men and boys, had been taken into the custody of the British occupation and imprisoned in Dunedin, Lyttleton, and Ripapa. This wave of imprisonments produced a 400 percent increase in the Māori population of the occupational prison system, from three percent of the total population in 1875 to 12 percent of the total population in 1880.

The problem which now faced the Crown, however, was justifying these imprisonments. Because the arrests took place in sovereign tribal territory, the constabulary had no legal authority to make arrests, especially given that the acts for which the ploughers and fencers were incarcerated did not breach any of the occupational British government's laws at the time. Rather than a technology for the punishment of social deviance, the prison here functioned as a weapon in the progression of colonialism and racist state power. This function is made explicit in the statements made by John Bryce, Minister of Native Affairs, in defence of the Māori Prisoner's Bill:

"This is not a Maori Prisoners' Bill that I am now proposing. The truth is, it was a mere farce to talk of trying these prisoners for the offences with which they were charged… If they had been convicted, in all probability they would not have got more than twenty-four hours' imprisonment, if so much, in addition to the term of imprisonment they had already served… Now in this Bill we drop that provision in regard to the trial altogether. We consider that to be a mere sham; and what we ask for now is that the Government shall have the power to say whether these men are to be detained in captivity or to be released."

The use of imprisonment was in defence of the Crown's capacity to enact raupatu on sovereign whenua in the process of the primitive accumulation of capital – a process directly described as colonial by Marx: "These methods [primitive accumulation] depend in part on brute force, e.g., the colonial system". From its earliest years in Aotearoa New Zealand, incarceration has been a tool of Pākehā economic violence enacted upon Māori in defence of capitalist production – but more than that, the prison represented a vector by which Māori could be made subject to forms of power which had hitherto never existed in Aotearoa New Zealand.

No sources on classical Māori society record the use of

incarceration as a technology of punishment. In contrast to what Kantorowicz described as the king's two bodies paradigm of juridical theology which was, in the 19th century, being rapidly replaced by disciplinary technologies, precolonial Māori society did not conceptualise all crime and deviance as an attack on the power of the sovereign. Despite the existence of a political structure with chiefs, elders and authority figures, 'Offenders and victims must be seen in the context of extended family'. This definitively did not preclude violent punishment for crimes, but the differences in the logics of punishment mean classical Māori culture cannot easily be described in Foucault's terminology. When acts of violence were carried out against perpetrators, it was done not to assert the sovereign's right of death but to satisfy the principle of utu. Utu 'emphasizes reciprocity and the maintenance of harmonious relationships between members of society'. When the harm done by an act is irreparable, as in acts of sexual violence, the only reciprocation might be death.

Clearly precolonial Māori society was not organised in terms of disciplinary biopower, but the focus on relationships and restorative justice, without recourse to the centrality of power, mean it cannot easily be described as operating purely under the power of the sovereign. Crimes are not understood as transgressions against the power of the state to order the lives of its subjects in the most productive arrangement possible. Rather community-oriented, restorative justice techniques prevailed. Tikanga Māori conceives of crime in a relational context, with a focus on repairing and healing the damage done to these relationships by acts which transgress a community's bounds of acceptable behaviour. "[R]emoving someone from the community, by sending him or her through the penitentiary system for example, does not mend relationships or contribute to healing the harm."

The use of incarceration is, clearly, incompatible with the principles of Māori punishment regimes. Given that these regimes arise from the fundamental tikanga which form Māori culture, the prison as an oppositional alternative to those regimes can only be understood as standing in opposition to fundamental aspects of Māori culture. Where tikanga Māori addresses and heals communities, the prison was imported as a tool of colonialism specifically to break those communities. In the prison, according to Foucault, "The crowd… is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities". It is this atomising, individualising effect of the prison as a specific technology, and discip-linary biopower as a whole, which the occupational government of New Zealand needed to enact upon Māori in the colonial era if capital production was to proceed uninhibited. The prison's role was as one of the means by which this was achieved.

Following the 'New Social Movements' of the 1960s and 1970s (the Māori renaissance, women's liberation, environmentalism) the nature of this racist economic relationship – that between Māori, the prison, and Pākehā capitalism – evolved. No longer were policies of overt racism and assimilationism acceptable, but the oppression and exploitation of Māori continued. The process by which this exploitation was effected was no longer primitive accumulation but exploitation in the labour market. While formal antiracist cultural policies are in place, Māori as a class are still concentrated in poverty, earning $3 less per hour on average than Pākehā.

Writing on Māori labour, Winiata said that "The employment experience of the Maori partner may be characterised as FOLI: First Out, Last In… Māori [are] the shock absorber for the Nation's economy". In Marxist terms, Māori constitute the majority of the reserve army of labour – the pool of latent un- and under-employed workers on whom production can draw if the workforce needs to be expanded. In Aotearoa, this funneling of Māori into the reserve army of labour follows from Winiata's assertion that:

"Aotearoa New Zealand has a dual economy. There is the Maori economy; there is the Pakeha economy. The unemployment experience, the level of training, the age distribution, the health experience, the housing condition, the degree of diversification and liquidity of the asset base and so on are quite different between the two economies."

All of the variables described by Winiata typify the subordinate condition of Māori in the labour market, and this subordination serves to ensure that Māori remain a large population in competition for a small pool of available jobs, or as Marx and Engels say, "Relative surplus-population is therefore the pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works". With supply of labour relatively high, and demand for labour relatively low, the price at which the capitalist class may have it is kept low. With wages low, more value may be expropriated from the labour of workers – thus, the maintenance of large populations of Māori in poverty is a key aspect of the system of capital production in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Michelle Alexander argues that, in the United States of America, mass incarceration emerged as a response to the end of formal legal segregation. As in Aotearoa New Zealand with the Māori renaissance, the Black civil rights movement made it impossible for the capitalist class in the United States to continue formal policies of racist discrimination. For racialised exploitation of labour to continue, textually colour blind but functionally racist policies of discrimination would need to develop. In Aotearoa New Zealand, as in the United States, these policies were achieved through a combination of legalised discrimination in employment against those with

*Page ten*

criminal records and institutional racism in the criminal justice system. While it is illegal to discriminate against Black or Māori people on the basis of their race, it is legal to discriminate against them on the basis of their criminal history. Mass incarceration, then, bridges the gap between capital production through primitive accumulation (the expropriation of Māori land and resources) and capital production through the labour market (the expropriation of Māori labour value).

The circuit formed between formally colour blind employment discrimination against those with criminal records and the criminal justice system functions as a form of racist state power, and discriminatory practices in the criminal justice system are the means by which this power is made to operate. In apprehension, in prosecution, in conviction and in sentencing, at every stage in its deployment, the criminal justice system works against Māori to produce an environment in which employers may discriminate against them. The occupational New Zealand Police force made 171,000 apprehensions in 2013, and of them Māori constituted 45 percent despite comprising only 15 percent of the population. Of those apprehended, 67 percent of Māori were prosecuted in contrast to only 61.6 percent of Pākehā. Of those prosecuted, 20.4 percent of Māori were acquitted as opposed to 24.6 percent of Pākehā. Of those convicted, Māori are 7.5 times more likely to receive custodial sentences than Pākehā, and those sentences are 15 to 18 times longer than those given Pākehā.

Mass incarceration sits at the head of an entire criminal justice system which produces Māori criminality for the purpose of racist economic control, but it is this concentration of Māori in custodial sentencing where the prison is most implicated. According to the Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004, after seven years subjects of the occupational New Zealand government are no longer required to notify potential employers of their criminal records. The act, however, specifically excludes those sentenced to custodial sentences, including incarceration and home detention. Given that Māori are overwhelmingly subjected to these sentences, the act de facto excludes huge proportions of Māori from being able to keep their criminal history from employers – and therefore hugely limits Māori employment opportunities. While the occupational government passes acts which exculpate the majority of Pākehā with criminal histories, Māori are still subjected to what Alexander calls the Box, "… in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal." This discrimination, stigma and exclusion are all potentiated through the prison, which in the 21st century functions as a cornerstone of state economic racism.

From its roots in colonialism and occupation in the 19th century to its role in manipulating the labour market in the 21st, the prison has at every point in its history in Aotearoa New Zealand been a tool of racist state power. Capital, Marx proposes, 'comes dripping head to foot… with blood and dirt.' If this is so, then the prison follows not far behind it, sustained on Māori blood and Māori dirt **@@@**

(First published on Emmy's Anarchacannibalism blog).

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# Decolonising Scotland

By Ken V.

IN JUNE 1997 the residents of the Isle of Eigg in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland reversed 169 years of landlordism by buying back their island for £1.5 million. They were assisted financially by the Highland Regional Council (their local authority) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which had been involved in protecting and managing the natural landscape and fauna of the 3000-hectare island. The previous owner, a rich absentee landlord, had ruled the island by neglect in a feudal system described by the island's retired doctor as "like living under enemy occupation, except you're not allowed to shoot the buggers".

### The Assynt buy-outs

Assynt is a region in the south-west of Sutherland in the Highlands of Scotland. On 1 February 1993, Assynt Crofters' Trust became the owners of the North Lochinver Estate, which they renamed the North Assynt Estate. The area consisted almost entirely of crofting (small tenancies) land, with 13 crofting townships being set up during the Highland Clearances. After two unsuccessful bids, their final bid of £300,000 was accepted. The Trust, a company limited by guarantee, had been formed to make a bid for the land, which came up for sale the previous year. Membership of the trust was open to crofters within the estate. The trust aimed to buy the estate and keep it under the control of the crofters, and to develop the area by initiating projects such as house building, job creation and tree planting.

In June 2005 the Glencanisp estate and the neighbouring Drumrunie estate were bought by the local community. The Assynt Foundation aims to create local employment and safeguard the natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of the community and future generations, and for the enjoyment of the wider public. The estates of Glencanisp and Drumrunie totalling some 18,000 hectares are managed by the Assynt Foundation on behalf of the Assynt community.

### Brief history of feudalism and colonisation in Scotland

A feudal system arose in Scotland in the twelfth century under the influence of the Scottish King David I's Normanised court. It was set up to give rewards to local leaders who supported the king with fealty, soldiers and money. Land was 'enclosed' or privatised into individual ownership, allowing rents and feudal duties to be extracted from those living on the land. Land came to have a market value based on what profits could be made from it, rather than its intrinsic value of how many people could live off it. Alienation from land, either tribal or national, has been the norm ever since, and the British empire exported this system to its overseas colonies as well.

The feudal system should be distinguished from the clan system which was continued, in modified form, into the eighteenth century. The feudal system consisted of a landlord (laird), often a member of the nobility, who owned the land and exacted tribute and money from tenants. Under the clan system, the land was owned by the clan of the district, who shared the same surname but were not necessarily blood relations of the chief. The chief received tribute and money but also led the clan soldiers in battle and ensured that all clan members were looked after, in a form of social welfare.

After the Scottish King James VI succeeded to the English throne in 1603 on the death of Queen Elizabeth I (the union of the crowns), a policy of 'civilising' the tribal regions of Britain and Ireland was introduced. Colonisation of North America began under James, and poor, mainly Scottish, Protestants, were established in indigenous Catholic land in Ulster, Northern Ireland, leading to centuries of civil strife. The twelve most powerful clan chiefs of Scotland were kidnapped and imprisoned until they agreed to sign the Statutes of Iona in 1609. These statutes required the eldest son of a leading family to be educated in English rather than Gaelic, undermining the indigenous language and culture. After the battle of Culloden in 1746 freedom of assembly and the right to wear tartan, the distinguishing sign of each clan, were outlawed for several decades. In this way colonisation of the mind as well as the land was effected.

The 'Highland Clearances' took place throughout the nineteenth century, when large numbers of Highlanders were driven off their land and their homes burned. They were replaced by sheep and cattle, to make more money for landowners. Half a million people were displaced to cities to work in the factories of the industrial revolution, or shipped overseas to populate the colonies and oppress indigenous people living there in turn. Those left behind paid rent and tax to the descendants of people who had, in many cases, stolen the land centuries earlier.

## Tenant farmers: the crofting system

Crofting means living on a smallholding leased from a landlord. Most crofting land in the Highlands is of poor quality for farming. Crofting is a subsistence lifestyle based on a mixture of agriculture (crops, sheep, cattle, pigs, poultry), fishing, weaving and tourism. Some crofters also supplement their income with part-time work in towns or industry such as forestry. As in many indigenous communities around the world, there has been a deep sense of disempowerment, loss of culture, and a higher level of unemployment, smoking, alcohol abuse and suicide. Depopulation and loss of younger people to lowland cities and abroad has been common.

Until the system was abolished by the Scottish Parliament established in 1997, Scotland was the only country in the world still retaining a formally feudal system in which tenants were 'vassals' in law to their 'feudal superiors'. 'Lairds', as landowners were known, could abuse communities by evicting tenants, monopolising or taxing commercial activity and damaging the environment for bloodsport management.

As of 2015, 432 landowners, 0.008 per cent of the population, own half of all privately owned land in Scotland. Land ownership, like wealth in the world in general, has become concentrated among fewer and fewer people over the last 50 years. Many are non-resident, absentee landlords. They include English aristocrats, Arabian oil sheikhs, Swiss bankers, South African industrialists, racing car drivers, pop stars, arms dealers and others not noted for their socio-ecological awareness. Their only qualification to own Scotland is being rich.

There are no controls on who can buy what quantity of land, no requirement of residency as there is in many other countries, few controls over how a landowner can use or abuse land except where buildings are concerned, and only 26 percent of Scotland's land is registered in the land register.

## Similarities to Aotearoa/New Zealand

There are many similarities between the colonisation of Scotland and of Aotearoa. Both nations had a declaration of independence, Scotland's being the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), and later signed a treaty of union. Both had a clan or tribal system linked to a geographical location. In both, land was bought or confiscated from the indigenous people, who had previously owned and managed it communally. Land was privatised, enclosed and increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The health, social and cultural effects of colonisation were similar in Highlanders and Māori.

## An alternative vision

The Stornoway Trust, established in 1923, owns 28,000 hectares of land on the Isle of Lewis. Tenants are usually their own landlord, in a communitarian system of land ownership. This allows freedom for individuals to manage their allotted land while maintaining community oversight, which protects the natural environment and the rights of all individuals in the community.

Groups like the Eigg Trust, the Assynt crofters and the Stornoway Trust are community land trusts where rents go to support democratic community self-management. Usually residents remain tenants, but as they are also the landlords, their tenancy is to their collective selves. Such a system is neither capitalist nor communist, but communitarian. In crofting, the tenancies can be inherited.

## The future

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act introduced in 2003 by the Scottish Parliament provided a Land Fund to assist community buy-outs in rural areas. Communities able to run their own affairs have increased tourism and local jobs and have reversed a trend of depopulation, producing new industries, housing and off-grid electricity, for example.

More recently, the Scottish Land Action Movement (SLAM) was formed. It is a collective of activists all striving for the same goal – to deliver comprehensive and radical land reform in Scotland. They call for greater powers for communities to buy and own land and for statutory rights of registration of interest in land, pre-emption over land, and a right to buy land through a compulsory purchase order where there is a clear benefit to the community, both urban and rural. Other goals include mandatory registration of land ownership, land value rating, a limit to the amount of land an individual or legal entity can own, security for tenants in rented accommodation, a strong self-build housing sector and more rights for tenant farmers.

The Scottish government, which has devolved control of land and local body matters, has been much more sympathetic to these goals than the UK government based at Westminster has in the previous 300 years. It remains to be seen how successful SLAM is in achieving its aims.

## Relevance to anarchism

Restoration of land to community ownership, as happened in Eigg and Assynt, would be an essential part of setting up an anarchist society. Local communities in city suburbs, towns, larger areas of countryside, or islands would be the basic unit of an anarchist society. The trusts involved in the Scottish buy-backs are community-led and community-run, with rotation of elected representatives, similar to the way an anarchist society would be organised, along with community feedback and participation through regular meetings **@@@**

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SLAM www.scottishlandactionmovement.org

BOOK REVIEW

# A wonderful ease

**Wars Without End – the land wars in nineteenth century New Zealand by Danny Keenan**
**Penguin 2009**
**Reviewed by Peppertree**

BY CHOOSING the title *Wars Without End*, Danny Keenan puts an important conclusion of his book on the land wars right up front. While the gun fighting mainly took place between 1843 and 1872, the battle over land has continued endlessly in the courts, in parliament and in tribunal hearings. In the age of neoliberalism, the armed forces have been replaced by hordes of property developers who continue to dispossess people of a place to live.

Every chapter of the very detailed book clearly shows how utterly incompatible the British concept of individual property titles and the collective ownership model of Māori society are. The British system with its clearly defined, surveyed and permanently owned plots was imposed on a society where land had always been collectively owned, borders were forever shifting and claims to ownership were changing and contested. According to Keenan, Māori had an "integrated, legitimate and culturally specific system of rights, checks and balances encompassing the land" that was diametrically opposed to the rigid European system of individual, permanent land titles.

What Keenan doesn't mention (and it's beyond the scope of a book about the land wars) is that it was only 100 years earlier that the British system was not all that different. Up until the beginning of the Inclosures Acts of the 18th century, the Commons existed as communal spaces for the landless peasants. The demand by the British settlers for land could be seen as reaction to their own loss of land. The emerging economic system, capitalism, demanded security in land ownership and that was easier to be had in New Zealand where settlers were being supported by the British government, than in Britain where the fight would have been against the government. The book also shows how the colonial settler state avoided any attempt to understand the Maori concept of land ownership, let alone acknowledge it. In as early as 1841, land claims commissioner William Spain, who investigated the legality of William Wakefield's early land acquisitions, was "struggling to comprehend the interconnectedness of customary issues before him" and simply gave up. Instead of deciding to return land that was clearly illegally taken – even by 19th century colonial standards – Spain turned to compensating iwi for the permanent loss of land.

This early decision not to bother understanding the Māori land ownership system and to compensate for land loss instead of returning land to the original owners (because that would have been too hard to do without ever understanding who the rightful owners were) became the defining theme of settler state-Māori relationships. More than 20 years after Spain, the judges of the Compensation Court came to the conclusion that "our [the English] language supplies no words which fitly express the ideas of a Māori holding" and that "the idea of [a sole proprietary title] is contrary to the truth of Māori ownership."

It seems remarkable that this insight is simply noted after two decades of relentless war that cost thousands of lives. But the concept worked well for the state. So much so that in 1867 the chief judge at the Compensation Court, Francis Fenton, was surprised that the system of ignoring Māori ownership "would have worked with the wonderful ease which has marked its operation."

Keenan's book also shows why Māori never had a chance of winning the wars, despite winning many battles. One reason is that Māori were not accustomed to ongoing warfare. But the main reason is that, despite initially being outnumbered, the British government had plenty more options. While it was clearly visible what resources Māori had (it was known how many people lived where and what type and number of weapons they had), the colonial government had access to resources that were invisible to Māori. They could simply double their numbers by bringing in reinforcements from Australia and Britain if needed. They could import new technology which Māori had never seen.

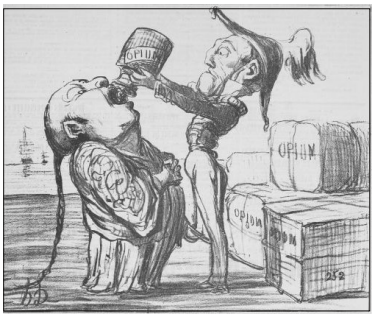
If one wanted to, one could read the book as a textbook for government tactics. It outlines how the colonial government used any strategy and tactic available: from the traditional divide and conquer of governor Gore Brown to the 'pacification through legal processes' by land commissioner William Spain to the full-on scorched earth policy of governor George Grey and his general Trevor Chute from 1865 onwards.

The central dogma of colonialism has always been the assumed superiority of everything European over everything Māori. This included from early on the economic system. Māori were told that if they did not see the benefits of 'free trade', they would be "ground to dust" (the Daily Southern Cross in 1865). And integral to free trade is individual property ownership. So everything comes back to the question of land: Te pūtake o te riri, the root of all trouble. This is how chief Te Rauparaha described the role of land disputes at the so-called (by Pākeha settlers) Wairau massacre in 1843 @@@

*Page fourteen*

BOOK REVIEW

# How low can you go?




**The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China by Julia Lovell**
**Picador, London 2011**
**Reviewed by Sam Buchanan**

EVEN in the bloody and hypocritical history of colonialism, it's rare for a state to use armed force to back criminal gangs against the laws of a recognised government. But around 1840 and 1860 Britain fought two wars with the immediate aim of forcing the Chinese government to allow British drug dealers to sell their illegal products in China.

Opium was one of the few products Britain had to offer the mostly self-sufficient Chinese empire. British demand for tea, silk and porcelain had caused a significant trade imbalance, and the Chinese had little interest in British products. The first war began after Chinese authorities tried to enforce laws against opium. The British responded by sending troops and warships to force the Chinese to accept the drug trade. The second war was justified by an even more astounding excuse – the arrest by Chinese authorities of a Chinese-owned ship engaging in the transport and sale of stolen goods. The ship had once been registered in Hong Kong, a British colony, and although the registration had expired, this was enough for British propagandists to claim that the Chinese authorities were interfering with the rights of British traders.

The planned war with China caused huge political debate in Britain, with a pro-free trade government losing a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, only to be re-elected after a campaign based largely on promoting war through the use of racist caricatures of the Chinese and the Chinese government. British ships bombarded China's cities, and an international coalition was formed to invade the country. The war was a walkover, thanks to superior military technology, the Chinese government's preoccupation with internal divisions and popular uprisings, and the poor quality of its armies. Rapes, murders (and pre-emptive suicides) and looting followed the victory, and the government was forced to sign a treaty opening up China to foreign trade – opium included – missionary activity and partial occupation.

British opium exports, handled by private dealers supplied by government factories in British-ruled India, increased tenfold in the last half of the 19th Century, to more than 4000 tonnes per year, creating a massive economic drain and a huge heath issue.

Julia Lovell's book covers these facts fairly well. It's an easy to read account of the wars and political machinations of the time. What is astounding is the political commentary that comes with it. Lovell seems to have no sense that a British academic may not be the best person to write a neutral account of one of Britain's great crimes. Given the record, she can't help but condemn the British side, but the book is full of the usual excuses for colonisation. She tells us that the Chinese should have been more 'pragmatic' in their dealings with the British, that dodgy Chinese business people were involved in the trade along with the British gangsters (referred to throughout as 'merchants'), that the economic impact of opium was exacerbated by other factors and that the Chinese government was too aloof, delegating dealing with the British to local business-people. British frustrations with complex state Chinese protocol and bureaucracy are highlighted, though the British state's love of arcane rituals and rules of etiquette don't get a mention.

Lovell might be right so far as historical facts go, but there's an awful lot of victim-blaming going on in this book. Chinese failures are minor compared with the basic principle that invading other countries and massacring their citizens in order to force them to buy your products and override their public health laws isn't a decent way to behave.

Moving to the modern era, Lovell is very critical of the Chinese Communist Party's 'patriotic education' which places considerable emphasis on the Opium Wars – again she has a point. Chinese state education promotes an absurdly simplistic propaganda-laden view of the time, presenting the events as little more than a melodrama where good Chinese nationalists determinedly resist nasty, corrupt imperialists. Trouble is, the author doesn't mention Britain's own historical viewpoint, where the events aren't so much misrepresented, as declared non-existent. Lovell thinks the Chinese government makes too much of a fuss about the opium wars, but her own book is subtitled "... and the Making of China", which rather suggests that this was no minor fracas, but a significant point in China's history.

Politically, it's an inept book, but the history is reasonably well covered, so read critically it's worth a look, if only to further increase your amazement at the depths the morals of the state will plunge to when it's backing the capitalist desire for a quick buck @@@